

Timeline of the NPT

The following timeline provides a brief history of events related to the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty from the 1950s to the present.

1950s

July 29, 1957: The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) comes into existence with the mission of promoting and overseeing the peaceful use of nuclear technology. President Dwight Eisenhower had called for the creation of such an agency in his December 1953 “Atoms for Peace” proposal.



Franz Matsch, Austria's permanent representative to the UN and Paul Robert Jolles, executive secretary of the 18-nation Preparatory Commission for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), sign a conference agreement to secure facilities for the first General Conference of the IAEA on July 24, 1957 in Vienna.

October 17, 1958: Ireland proposes the first resolution at the United Nations to prohibit the “further dissemination of nuclear weapons.”

1960s

February 13, 1960: France conducts its first nuclear test explosion, becoming the world's fourth nuclear-armed state, after the United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom.

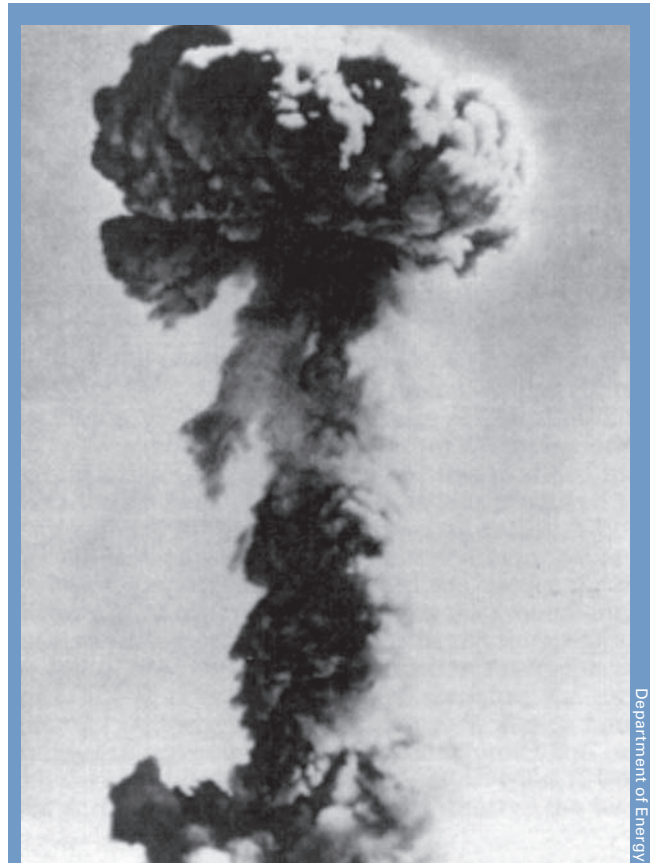
December 4, 1961: The UN General Assembly unanimously approves Resolution 1665, which is based on the earlier Irish draft resolution and calls for negotiations to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons to additional states. The resolution says that countries already having nuclear weapons would “undertake to refrain from relinquishing control” of them to others and would refrain “from transmitting information for their manufacture to States not possessing” them. Countries without nuclear weapons would agree not to receive or manufacture them. These ideas formed the basis of the NPT.

March 21, 1963: In a press conference, President John Kennedy warns, “I see the possibility in the 1970s of the president of the United States having to face a world in which 15 or 20 or 25 nations may have [nuclear] weapons. I regard that as the greatest possible danger and hazard.”

Kennedy made this statement a month after a secret Department of Defense memorandum assessed that eight countries—Canada, China, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Sweden, and West Germany—would likely have the ability to produce nuclear weapons within 10 years. The study also calculated that, beyond 10 years, the future costs of nuclear weapons programs would diminish and that several more states would likely be able to pursue nuclear weapons, especially if unrestricted testing continued. The risks of such proliferation, which the existing nuclear powers sought to curtail or prevent, largely served as an impetus for drafting the NPT. Today the IAEA assesses that nearly 30 states are capable of developing nuclear weapons, but only nine states are known to possess them.



President John Kennedy addresses the press in March 1963 in Washington, D.C.



Department of Energy

October 16, 1964: China conducts its first nuclear test explosion, becoming the world’s fifth nuclear-armed state and leading to the acceleration of India’s nuclear program.

August 17, 1965: The United States submits to the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Committee its first draft proposal to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. The Soviet Union submits its first draft a month later.

February 14, 1967: The Treaty of Tlatelolco, establishing Latin America and the Caribbean as a nuclear-weapon-free zone, is opened for signature. It is the first of five such regional zones to be negotiated. The other zones cover Africa, Southeast Asia, the South Pacific, and Central Asia.

August 24, 1967: The United States and Soviet Union separately introduce identical draft treaties to the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Committee on preventing the spread of nuclear weapons.

Circa 1967: Israel secretly acquires the capability to build a nuclear explosive device.

June 12, 1968: The UN General Assembly adopts Resolution 2373, endorsing the draft text of the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). The vote was 95 to 4 with 21 abstentions. The four no votes were Albania, Cuba, Tanzania, and Zambia.



Jim Gray/Keystone/Getty Images

July 1, 1968: The NPT is opened for signature and is signed by the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Article IX of the treaty established that entry into force would require the treaty's ratification by those three countries (the treaty's depositories) and 40 additional states.

China and France, the other two recognized nuclear-weapon states under the treaty, do not sign it. China argued the treaty was discriminatory and refused to sign or adhere to it. France, on the other hand, indicated that it would not sign the treaty but "would behave in the future in this field exactly as the States adhering to the Treaty." Both states acceded to the treaty in 1992.

1970s

March 5, 1970: The NPT enters into force with 46 states-parties.

May 18, 1974: India is the first non-nuclear-weapon state, as defined by the NPT, to conduct a nuclear test. India was not an NPT member, and New Delhi insisted the test was a "peaceful" nuclear explosion to mollify international criticism. In 1997, however, Raja Ramanna, the former director of India's nuclear program, admitted that the 1974 blast was a weapons test, stating, "I just want to make clear that the test was not all that peaceful." Despite India's original characterization of the test as peaceful, it raised alarms within the international community, particularly in Canada and the United States. Both countries had supplied facilities and materials to India for peaceful nuclear purposes and felt betrayed by India's use of them to conduct a nuclear explosion. The United States reacted by leading other nuclear exporters to form the voluntary Nuclear Suppliers Group in 1975 to coordinate stricter

restrictions on global nuclear trade.

Originally, the NPT allowed non-nuclear-weapon states to conduct peaceful nuclear explosions. During the 2000 NPT review conference, however, treaty states-parties agreed to ban such tests in light of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which was completed in 1996.



Punjab Photo/AFP/Getty Images

A crater marks the site of India's May 18, 1974 underground nuclear test at Pokhran in the desert state of Rajasthan.

September 3, 1974: The IAEA publishes the “trigger list” developed by the Zangger Committee, identifying nuclear items that require IAEA safeguards as a condition of export.

May 30, 1975: The 91 states-parties to the NPT hold the treaty’s first review conference. The treaty members decide to hold such conferences to review

the implementation of the treaty every five years.

January 11, 1978: States participating in the voluntary Nuclear Suppliers Group provide the IAEA with a common set of guidelines they will follow in making nuclear exports. The IAEA publishes the guidelines the next month.

1980s

The decade was dominated by the Cold War superpower competition of the United States and the Soviet Union. Much of the world held its collective breath during the first years of the decade as tensions and the nuclear arms race heated up between the two rivals, leading to popular anti-nuclear protests worldwide and the nuclear freeze movement in the United States. The international community exhaled a bit in the second half of the decade as the United States and the Soviet Union earnestly sat down at the arms negotiating table and for the first time eliminated an entire category of nuclear weapons through the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. The two countries also proceeded to negotiate cuts to their strategic nuclear forces, which ultimately would be realized in the landmark 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

Although the U.S.-Soviet nuclear arms race was

center stage, efforts to advance and constrain the nuclear weapons ambitions and programs of other countries played out in the wings, sometimes as part of the superpower drama. For instance, the United States shunted nonproliferation concerns aside in ignoring Pakistan’s nuclear weapons program because of that country’s role in fighting Soviet forces inside Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Iraq, North Korea, and South Africa advanced their nuclear weapons efforts in relative secrecy. In this decade, Iran began to secretly acquire uranium-enrichment-related technology from Pakistani suppliers. Taiwan’s covert nuclear weapons program, however, was squelched by U.S. pressure. Other nonproliferation gains included a joint declaration by Argentina and Brazil to pursue nuclear technology only for peaceful purposes, alleviating fears of a nuclear arms race between the two, and the conclusion of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the South Pacific. Moreover, the NPT added 30 new states-parties during the decade, including North Korea.



Kazakhstani citizens gather to demand a nuclear test ban at the Soviet nuclear test site near Semipalatinsk in August 1989.

1990s

April 3, 1991: The UN Security Council adopts Resolution 687 requiring Iraq to eliminate its secret nuclear weapons program, which was revealed after the Iraqi defeat in the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Iraq had illegally pursued the weapons program despite being an NPT state-party.

Following the adoption of Resolution 687, the IAEA gained a greater understanding of Iraq's clandestine program and dismantled and sealed its remnants. The realization that Iraq pursued such a program undetected in spite of agency inspections served as a key impetus to strengthen IAEA safeguards. That effort eventually produced the Model Additional Protocol.

The IAEA maintained a presence in Iraq until its inspectors were forced to withdraw in late 1998 on the eve of U.S. and British military strikes against Iraq. Throughout the 1990s, the United States expressed concern that Iraq maintained the ability

and intention to reconstitute its nuclear weapons program, as well as other efforts to produce other "weapons of mass destruction" (WMD). These suspicions led to the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1441 in November 2002, declaring Iraq in material breach of its obligations to comply with international inspections and establishing a renewed inspection process. Although those inspections did not uncover evidence that Iraq had reconstituted its nuclear weapons program, the United States and the United Kingdom asserted that Iraq continued to pursue unconventional arms and, on March 20, 2003, led a military invasion to topple Iraq's leadership. Inspections afterward revealed that the U.S. and British allegations were wrong.

July 10, 1991: South Africa accedes to the NPT. Two years later, the South African government admits that it had covertly built six completed nuclear devices and then dismantled them before joining the accord. The move to get rid of the weapons was seen as preparation for the coming end of apartheid rule.



UN Photo/Saw Lwin

The UN Security Council votes on Resolution 687 mandating intrusive inspections in Iraq on April 3, 1991 in New York.

March 9, 1992: China accedes to the NPT.

May 23, 1992: Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine sign the Lisbon Protocol committing to join the NPT as non-nuclear-weapon states. All three had nuclear weapons when they were Soviet republics. On December 5, 1994, Ukraine becomes the last of the three to accede to the NPT.

August 3, 1992: France, the last of the five recognized nuclear-weapon states, accedes to the NPT.

March 12, 1993: North Korea announces its

intention to withdraw from the NPT, but it suspends that withdrawal on June 11, 1993.

April 1, 1993: The IAEA declares North Korea in noncompliance with its safeguards obligations and refers Pyongyang to the UN Security Council.

April 11, 1995: The UN Security Council adopts Resolution 984 acknowledging the unilateral pledges by the five nuclear-weapon states not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states-parties to the NPT. The move is seen as a way to win greater support for the possible indefinite extension of the treaty.

May 11, 1995: NPT states-parties agree to the treaty's indefinite extension. Article X of the NPT called for a conference of states-parties to be held 25 years after the treaty's entry into force in order to determine whether the treaty would remain in force indefinitely or for other additional periods of time. This conference was held in 1995 and began with considerable uncertainty regarding the nature of any extension. Non-nuclear-weapon states, particularly developing countries belonging to the Nonaligned Movement, expressed disappointment with the lack of progress toward nuclear disarmament and feared that a decision to extend the treaty indefinitely would by default enable the nuclear-armed states to hold on to their nuclear arsenals in perpetuity and avoid any accountability in eliminating them. At the conference, Indonesia and South Africa proposed tying the treaty's indefinite extension to a decision to strengthen the treaty review

process. They also linked it to establishment of a set of principles and objectives on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament to hold NPT states-parties, particularly the nuclear-weapon states, accountable to their commitments. These principles and objectives include completion of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and negotiations on the cutoff of fissile material production for weapons purposes. The conference also adopted a resolution calling for establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. This resolution was intended to win support for the indefinite NPT extension from Arab states, which objected to Israel's status outside the NPT and its assumed possession of nuclear weapons. Although only a majority of states-parties was required to approve the indefinite extension, the agreed package of decisions obtained enough support that such a vote was not required.



Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty states-parties vote to extend the treaty indefinitely May 11, 1995 at UN Headquarters in New York.

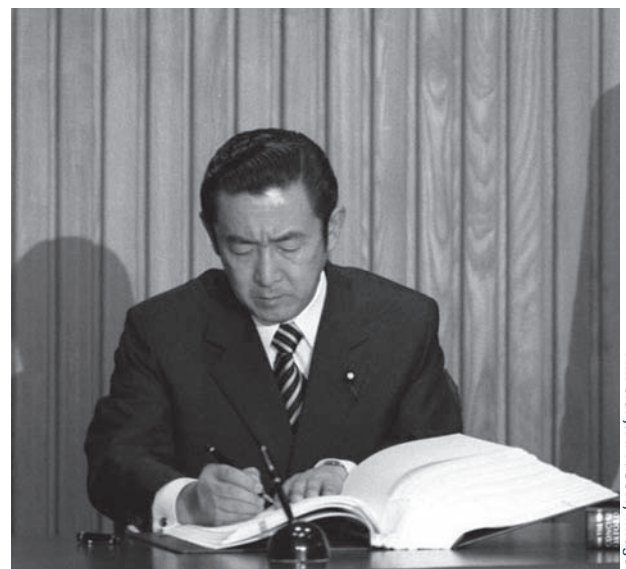
Jon Levy/AFP/Getty Images

September 24, 1996: The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty outlawing nuclear explosions is opened for signature. The treaty has yet to enter into force because not all of the requisite states, including China, India, Pakistan, and the United States, have ratified it.

May 15, 1997: The IAEA adopts the Model Additional Protocol, a voluntary safeguards agreement for a state to give the agency greater powers to verify that illegal nuclear weapons-related activities are not taking place inside that state. The protocol was developed in response to Iraq's and North Korea's illicit actions under the treaty.

May 11 & 13, 1998: India conducts nuclear tests for the second time.

May 28, 1998: In response to India, Pakistan, a nonsignatory to the NPT but a non-nuclear-weapon state by the treaty's terms, conducts its first set of nuclear test explosions.



Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto signs the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty September 24, 1996 at UN Headquarters in New York.

Tim Clary/AFP/Getty Images

2000s

May 22, 2000: The NPT states-parties agree to a 2000 review conference final document that outlines the so-called 13 Steps for progress toward nuclear disarmament, including an “unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals.”

January 10, 2003: North Korea announces its withdrawal from the NPT. North Korea initially announced its intent to withdraw from the NPT a decade earlier following suspicions of NPT violations. After holding talks with the United States, North Korea suspended that withdrawal in June 1993, just a day before it would have come into effect. It further agreed to give up its nuclear weapons program under a 1994 agreement with the United States.

Following the collapse of that agreement in 2002, North Korea declared January 10, 2003, that, with only one day remaining of its previous three-month notification requirement to withdraw from the NPT, its withdrawal would come into effect a day later. Although the legality of North Korea’s process of withdrawal remains in question, subsequent calls by the UN and the IAEA for Pyongyang to return to the NPT demonstrate a recognition that it is currently outside the treaty. Article X of the NPT recognizes the right of states to withdraw from the treaty if that party’s “supreme interests” are jeopardized by “extraordinary events.” States are required to give notice three months in advance before such a withdrawal would take effect. In light of North Korea’s withdrawal and subsequent development of nuclear weapons, the 2005 NPT review conference considered ways to ensure that states that withdraw from the treaty are not able to use technologies and materials obtained while an NPT state-party to pursue nuclear weapons. Discussions of these various proposals are still ongoing.

June 6, 2003: The IAEA issues a report detailing Iranian clandestine nuclear activities that Tehran failed to report to the agency, in violation of its safeguards agreement.

December 19, 2003: Libya announces that it will dismantle its WMD programs, including a secret nuclear weapons program, and agrees to IAEA inspections and adherence to an additional protocol.

September 19, 2005: North Korea commits to abandoning its nuclear weapons and programs and returning to the NPT and to IAEA safeguards in an agreement of the six-party talks on North Korean denuclearization.

September 24, 2005: The IAEA finds Iran in noncompliance with its safeguards obligations after nearly two years of inspections into its undeclared nuclear activities. The agency in February 2006 refers Iran to the UN Security Council, which adopts three sanctions resolutions against Iran over the next two years. IAEA investigations continue into Iran’s past and current nuclear activities.

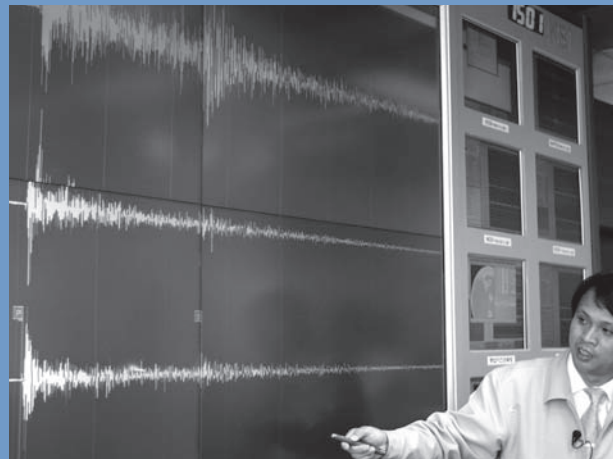
October 9, 2006: North Korea conducts its first nuclear test explosion.

February 13, 2007: The six-party talks on North Korea’s denuclearization yields an “initial actions” plan to implement Pyongyang’s September 2005 pledge to abandon its nuclear weapons and programs. These initial actions include the shutdown and disablement of North Korea’s Yongbyon nuclear reactor complex and a declaration of its nuclear programs.

September 6, 2008: The Nuclear Suppliers Group agrees to permit trade in nuclear material and technology with India, despite that country’s status as a nonparty to the NPT and de facto nuclear-weapon state.

April 14, 2009: North Korea ends its participation in the six-party talks, after its launch of a long-range rocket draws sanctions from the UN Security Council. North Korea declares it will reverse its 2007 commitments, and resume its nuclear programs.

May 25, 2009: North Korea conducts a second announced nuclear test.



During a May 25 press briefing in Seoul, a South Korean meteorological official displays charts that demonstrate the sudden spike in seismic activity at the time of North Korea’s nuclear test earlier that day.

September 24, 2009: The UN Security Council, meeting in a special summit-level session, unanimously approves Resolution 1887 on nuclear issues.